

CORRUPTION IN FOOTBALL

Foul Play

2006 was a dark year for the Italian football nation. The former manager of FC Juventus Turin, one of the most popular teams in the league, was accused of manipulating games with the help of corrupt referees, players and officials. As a consequence, the team had to dismount to the second league and its last two-championship titles 2005 and 2006 were withdrawn. The manager was punished to 5 years of occupational ban. In total, 26 officials were accused.



Another of the major football scandals in Europe, the "Golden Whistle", occurred in 2004 in Portugal. 171 persons, including 110 arbitrators, two mayors and the league's president, were accused of having manipulated the outcome of championship games.

In China, an official referee was accused for manipulating games in the Chinese football league. In South Africa, 34 of the 40 best-qualified referees are accused of the same crime.

However, the manipulation of games and sport events is not a phenomenon limited to modern society only. History shows that corruption was also an issue in ancient sports. In the Olympics of Ancient Greece, corrupt athletes were imposed to finance the building of columns located in the entrance of the Olympic stadium to symbolize their disgrace.

Usually, sports which depend strongly on the subjective decisions of referees, such as boxing or tennis, are more affected by corruption. The results in sports like the 100-meter sprint, where the starting point and the finishing line are clear, are unlikely to be manipulated by corruption.

Today, one of the sports most affected by corruption is football. As a result, the reputation of football is falling, potential athletes are dismissing opportunities and sponsors are decreasing their assistance. The aggregate damage caused by corruption in football is barely calculable. Despite this, many representatives of football organizations worldwide still deny, or at least downplay, the threat of corruption.

Corruption destroys the essence of football. The wilful violation of sporting values, such as fairness and open competitions, eliminate the central meaning of the sport. It is the uncertainty of the game that makes the event so exciting. A team can play better than its opponent for 90 minutes, but still not leave the field as a winner. A single mistake can determine the team's victory or defeat, the joy or disappointment of thousands

of people, sometimes even of an entire nation. Perfection in sports is not possible, mistakes are part of the game and that is what makes it worth watching. However, errors can also be made voluntarily, for personal interest. The viewer notices nothing or hardly anything. Only doubts remain, today more than ever. Generally, corruption in football appears in many forms and in many areas. In countries in which the betting markets are less developed, corruption generally aims to achieve better rankings in the league. In countries with developed betting markets, corruption aims at manipulating individual games in order to maximize betting revenues. Corruption also appears in connection with the construction industry, for example in the decision of whom to contract to build football stadiums, or in which location certain events shall take place. One of the most famous cases occurred in Germany, where the president of a premier league football club received 2.8 million Euros from a construction company for insights that allowed the company to obtain the building contract for the stadium. Corruption can also appear in sponsorship, in television reporting and even in the process of appointing officials.

However, it is clear that today corruption in football is far more than just the manipulation of games. Nowadays, corruption has also affected another, more lucrative area of football: the deal with players. As an example, a former coach of Brazil's national team is under suspicion to have appointed 91 players in order to profit later from their higher market value. In a globalised world, corruption in football has obtained a whole new dimension. Markets are networked, transactions are inscrutable, and profits are high. Corruption has become a crime without borders, a veritably transnational organized crime. These circumstances imply that an international approach is necessary to fight the phenomenon. Cooperation between the private and public sector are fundamental. The involvement of the media and the civil society is indispensable. On this basis, UNICRI has developed a project, including all of these stakeholders.

As a first step, the project intends to develop an exemplary strategy to prevent and control the various types of corruption in football at a national and international level. This Anti-Corruption Strategy (ACS) shall be developed in conjunction with key decision-makers and institutions of football, representatives of national and international football leagues, national prosecutors and law enforcement officials, as well as the media and the civil society. This network would make it possible to identify the main corruption risks and to formulate clear activities and objectives. On the other hand, the network would build the platform for greater collaboration and ensure a direct exchange of information and know-how. Finally, the network would set the basis for the establishment of Public Private Partnerships (PPP), uniting the efforts and capacities of the public and the private sectors in the fight against corruption in football. The established partnerships and the Anti-Corruption Strategy would be the starting point for the implementation phase of the project. In this phase, the action plan formulated in the ACS shall be put in practice. In addition, the identified activities could be accompanied by complimentary measures.

One of the intended complimentary measures is the organization of awareness-raising campaigns, in order to amplify the support from the civil society as well as the private and public sector. The campaigns should be organized in close collaboration with the media, football clubs, players and fans, in order to attain the maximum publicity. Being the most popular sport in the world, football provides unique opportunities to challenge corruption in- and outside the stadiums. In order to further contribute to the changing of attitudes at large, the project intends to formulate target-oriented codes of conduct. These should define non-desirable and criminal behaviour of officials and athletes among each other and in relation to external partners such as the media and private interest groups. In order to ensure a more rapid and effective detection and prosecution of corruption, the project intends to identify and reinforce modern technical facilities. The development of manuals and toolkits would strengthen the law enforcement capacities and promote innovative and established practices.

Particularly in relation to the upcoming European Championship and the World Cup, the results of this project shall build the basis for future international initiatives to fight corruption, not only in football but in other sports as well. The instruments developed and used for advancing corruption control in football will be applied to other sports affected by the phenomenon.

Football is the most popular sport in the world, loved by millions of people across the globe regardless of class, gender or religion. It is played and followed by three billion people from China to England, Africa to South America, throughout Asia and Europe. The importance of football throughout the world, and especially in countries in transition, is much higher than it appears. Football is not only a game, but also an instrument of education, socialisation and peace. It is a game in which success can be achieved through hard work, regardless of income or social advantage. Football is a game in which fairness and rules are essential, where collaboration and compromises are necessary.

Corruption harms all these instruments and destroys its function. Corruption and football do not fit together, sometimes you lose and sometimes you win. There are days where your team plays better than you would have ever expected, these are the days everyone remembers, not only the players, but also their fans. These moments cannot be foreseen or controlled, they simply happen, that is the magic of football.

*Alexis Franke is project officer at UNICRI's Security Governance/Counter-Terrorism Laboratory.